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THE DECLINE OF CULTURE.

E. BENJAMIN ANDREWS.

EVEN more than civilization in general, the special phase of it called culture has its ups and downs. The age of Pericles suffered sunset, being followed by many a far stretch of chiaroscuro before full day shone again. Mæcenas would have scoffed had a prophet told him that there were to succeed his Augustan time whole centuries during which hardly a scholar in Europe would be able to read Homer or Plato, and when even Vergil would be known to but few. Yet such centuries came.

We do not expect dark ages now. The causes which fogged the air after Rome's great days are nowhere discoverable at present,—no Goths, no Huns, no Tartars either, unless, as Charles H. Pearson seems to think possible, the Chinese march west. It is, however, a remark deserving serious consideration that after Athens and after Rome, when old-time culture,—philosophy, science, literature, the stage, art, discussion, criticism, skepticism, construction, satire, ethical hortation, and the Christian Gospel,—had done their utmost to improve men's minds, hearts, and lives, notwithstanding all, mental twilight fell upon European society, stayed long, sat grievously, and was brightened out into noon again only by centuries of painful toil at light-making.

A certain obscuration of real culture is again observable and we as yet by no means see its worst. "The measure

of a nation's true success," says Lowell, "is the amount it has contributed to the truth, the moral energy and intellectual happiness, the spiritual hope and consolation of mankind." We of the United States cannot face this just criterion to-day so boldly as we could earlier. Our traffic in spirituals, never any too lively, has decreased. Our export of higher-life wares used to be greater than now. At date, we fear, the balance of the trade is against us.

Culture is the appreciation, not contemplative alone but active and efficient, of the non-economic values. It is not identical with virtue but involves that. It covers enlightenment, breadth, open-mindedness, chivalry, honor, generosity, magnanimity, justice, gentleness, devotion to principle, the courage of one's convictions, power to sustain, without courting it, loneliness, resisting popular clamors and mob movements whether plebeian or patrician. Your truly cultivated man will put on no airs, neither take off any. He is not afraid of that which is high nor ashamed of what is obscure, having opinions but not opinionated, firm without stubbornness, fine yet not effeminate, respectful to the past yet no slave of tradition. He loves and courts above all things Truth, and with that, if he can find it, he will stay, with that he will live and with that he will die, recking the minimum of what other men do or say. Faith is his, a view which bottoms reality in reason and spirit and equips righteousness with its everlasting yea.

Of this comprehensive quality our times, as compared with the not very remote past, display a lack. There is a falling off in men's desire to procure and promote the things of the mind, less thought than once of ideals, less enthusiasm for the true, the beautiful, and the good, less submission to these.

In each soul is born the pleasure
Of yearning onward, upward, and away,
When o'er our heads, lost in the vaulted azure,
The lark sends down his flickering lay.

Nowadays we do not yearn onward much, or upward, or away. Such postures are not in favor with the Four Hundred.

Much genuine unselfishness remains, but there is a great deal more which exists solely on paper or in sentiment. If a fellow-citizen is caught red-handed in doing an act of considerable self-denial, men gape at him as a wonder, pitying, however, rather than admiring. He means well, they admit; he is a right good fellow, but a fool nevertheless. Recently, on a Chicago street, a gentleman said to his walking mate, who was from St. Louis: "Look, d'ye see that tall man with the long Roman nose and spectacles?" "Yes," said the other, "what about him?" "Why, that's Judge Peter S. Grosscup, who, on a salary of \$6,000, refused an offer of a \$100,000 salary as attorney for the Northern Securities Company." "By gad," said the St. Louis party, "he looks that way; doesn't insanity run in the family?"

Fiction abjures romantic effort and turns horribly to realism, partly dry moralizing, partly nauseous pornography. Plenty of verse is composed and marketed, but little of it is true poetry, still less of it spiritual poetry. Stocks, bonds, deals, puts, calls, promoting, Wall Street entire, repel and sicken the muses. All about us we witness contempt for the simple life. When Charles Wagner's book on that subject was translated, its ideas, which, noteworthily, we had to import from France as we do our finest silks and wines, struck most Americans as discoveries. We are busy getting our living, unaware, meantime, that "after a man gets his living he has got to live." Wealth is amassed as never before, vast amounts of which no doubt go for books, paintings, elegant houses, ornaments, and artists' work of all sorts; but how few, comparatively, of the purchasers buy or enjoy with any higher motive than pride! Rich oafs spend fortunes for rare editions or bindings, which with infinite gusto they invite you to survey, posing as great patrons of letters, it taking but a test question or two to lay bare their hypocrisy. In

everything not allied with the winning of secular goods do we not to an unprecedented extent behold in men's characters and deeds distressing commonplace, a dead level, a stale uniformity?

Charles Wagner,—and we believe him,—says that we err in thinking of earlier ages as less mobile-minded than our own, in charging antique society with rigidity, monotony of thought and manners. Those ancient epochs which we love to represent as morbidly static, possessed a marvelous richness of thought, custom, and originality unknown at the present day. They had variety in uniformity; we have monotony in the midst of change. Our change means mostly the same thing over and over. Fashion was never so imperious as now.

In this age so rich in invention everything breeds uniformity. The ten thousand shapes which life and thought take on are propagated and impressed with astonishing rapidity. Science enables us to multiply infinitely all the things we invent and to throw them upon the market with cheapening profusion. Vulgarization debases all the arts. Is a masterpiece originated anywhere? Myriads of copies immediately flood the country. Opera airs the most beautiful pass forthwith to the hand-organ. In six weeks after a melody is first heard every one is singing and whistling it. So of all novelties in art or in social life. The city, possessing the engines of civilization, floods the country with its products, beating down and running out local peculiarities. Professor Royce rightly argues the mischief of this bleaching process, pointing out the incalculable benefit to our national character of local idiosyncracies. Let shallow people laugh at New England provincialism and berate the South for being solid. The wise rejoice that so much local apartness survives. Well may each remoter section of the country,—and without pharisaism,—rejoice in any traits it can claim as peculiarly its own, praying with unction daily: God, I thank thee that I am not as other sections are,—or even as great New York.

Centralization annuls not only the baneful and narrow in particularism but, worse still, its sap and vigor. The ponderous paving rollers of industrialism, bureaucracy, and fashion pass over society, crushing out originality and flattening individuals into specimens. Local manners, costumes, provincial songs and idioms disappear. Railway lines, depots, hotels, and theatres resemble each other like brothers. Towns and villages, drained, debilitated, each shorn of its individuality, are but the feeble images of cities.

Where, asks Mr. Wagner, whose thought we have been tracing,—where in such a world, can character, originality, the will to strike into new paths, get foothold? How can anyone take on an individual physiognomy. You must imitate. You must wear the ruling style of hat and coat, and tie your cravat in the latest knot, or you are a boor. Individuals are no longer turned out, but human samples,—by the dozen, by the gross. The stereotyped eye-glass, cane, gait, handshake, salutation, suggest automatons. You look for some factory stamp upon the lot. Fashion determines manners and ideas in the same way. Ruts form and grow deeper and deeper. People come to prefer herd-life. Out of it they are lost. They no longer attach value save to things they have seen, heard, or tasted in common. “It was bad,—no one had it.” “It was superb; they were tumbling over each other to get it.” To many a man ‘You’re a liar’ seems less an insult than ‘You’re queer.’

Industrialism involves another curse, the division of labor, as destructive of spiritual as it is creative of temporal wealth, and not confined any longer to mills and shops, but felt as well on ‘Change, at the bar, in newspaper-making, and even in teaching. Everywhere specializing breeds pettiness, an arid mind, thinking with the spinal cord instead of the brain. Even this would not be so bad if the manikins realized that they were such, but they deem themselves men and sages. Forced to be narrow, people take their dwarf conceptions as the measure of total reality.

It is doubtful whether what might be called the scientific mind is holding its own. Superstition not unlike belief in ghosts is still wide-spread and rank. Ideas of prayer as irrational as fetish worship have immense vogue among the people. The processes called divine healing, mental healing, faith cure, and so on, no doubt have some basis in recognized laws, but still a large part of the credence reposed in them is superstition pure and simple.

There is wide remission of enthusiasm for humanity. Few think it articulately; fewer avow it; but very many are in fact now cherishing a notion quite akin to that of slavery's advocates before the Civil War, that God has organized society aristocratically, the multitude being ordained to live ignorant, poor, in servitude to the elect. The victory of civilization, so many a contemporary argument implies, is to be judged by its consummate flower rather than by the number and distribution of its flowers, the state and fate of the common man being of little account if only wealth is adequate to the perfecting of culture in however few individuals. Our advanced communities now display a great deal less justice and fairness, man toward man, than was formerly seen. There is, indeed, less wrangling and objurgatory discussion than once. Even this, we fear, is mostly due to lack of frankness, not to a growing kindness of temper. Is not the same true touching the boasted tolerance of opinion observed on all hands? In private, men certainly storm against opponents with fearful rancor. Mark, too, the cold greed and rapacity with which business is carried on! Mercantile honor is not unknown, but it is relatively rarer than hitherto, less the rule. Promoting-deals, stock-manipulations, market-rigging, in intent and in effect every whit as bad as highway robbery, occur daily, evoking no protest save the bleating of shorn lambs.

While crimes of violence against person, and also crimes against property, in the way of large and open robbery, are growing less frequent,—partly because police service is better,—on the other hand, torts, crimes

of cunning, secret vices, tricks, however immoral and cruel, that can be worked in accordance with law, and especially offenses against personal purity, are everywhere on the increase. Meantime it is not simply abstention from wrong that human beings need in order to live well. It is enthusiasm for righteousness; it is mighty self-denial and heroic sacrifice;—not innocence but nobility, not continuance upon present moral levels, but inspiration and power to soar to the heights; and it is clear that latter-day motives are less and less adequate for those attainments.

We have thus far been looking at the malaise outwardly. Let us now get down to diagnosis. The culture pyæmia in American society may be traced, in the main, to four great plexuses of influences: one, the country's astounding growth in wealth; a second, the spread of communistic socialism; a third, bad theory and practice in education; and a fourth, depressing views of the world, life, and man.

1. In the United States the conjunction of virile population with boundless natural resources has created wealth with a rapidity never before attained. Then, right in the midst of this incomparable development, Pelion upon Ossa, mankind reached the world's limit of free arable land. For the first time in history it became impossible to acquire fertile soil by merely traveling to it. As the population of the globe was meantime increasing by leaps and bounds, the disappearance of free arable forced a rise in the values of all agricultural land within reach of markets, giving to our wealth a new and incalculable accession, since our arable, all of it near centers of population, was at once vaster, richer and in better tilth than that of any other nation. Thus the principle of unearned increment has wrought with our energy and industry and with our country's native fecundity to pile up here, in a generation, riches past the wildest dreams of Cræsus.

A mighty despiritualizing factor is thus in play over and above men's natural love of gain and reënforcing

that, a force not paralleled in any other land or at any earlier epoch in our own. Wealth-gaining is an obtrusive, all-engrossing phenomenon, over-shadowing all else,—massive, ubiquitous, obstreperous, never out of sight or out of mind. By its size it occludes the sun: the noise of it deafens reason's ear. We do not refer mainly to those professedly engaged in amassing riches; the frenzy spreads to all. Yon neighbor of mine has become rich; why should not I? Scholars, professors, the clergy, even saints courtesy to Mammon. Very rare is the man in any walk of life who is really contented with a decent plenty. If any perchance ask how much one must have to live comfortably, the chorus answers at once: "The utmost you can get." It was said by him of old time, "Life is more than meat"; the modern conviction would seem to be that life is identical with meat and the body with raiment.

2. Patriots are marking with interest the rapid multiplication of socialists. Our growing socialist vote is the one clear sign of momentous political change going on in America. Not the foreign-born alone poll it; not the illiterate only, but holders of diplomas, writers, thinkers. What is even more significant than socialists' numerical increase is the fact that your up-to-date socialist is a communist. There have always been communists, men who, conceiving wealth either as the sole good or as the necessary condition to all good, have urged the equal distribution of it among all the community's adults, disregarding both productive capacity and thrift. Of old, people of such a mind were not all socialists, but now to a man they are so and they probably form the great bulk of the socialist body in every country. There is, however, another class of socialists, sedate and studious citizens, who did not begin as communists: and the serious problem connected with recent socialist advance relates to these.

The first socialism announcing itself as a program for general society, to regulate production and not merely

consumption, was to a great extent a rational effort to cure patent, apparently remediable social inequalities. Its purpose was not leveling, nor would it have resulted in leveling had it been put in execution. It did not ignore the native, indomitable differences between human individuals, but took account of these, proposing to turn them to better social uses than before. Partly not to offend their *confrères* who were communists, and still more, perhaps, because no workable plan other than equal distribution has been or can be found for artificially dividing a society's income, the kind of socialists who would have been glad not to do so bow to the communistic blast. No standard socialistic work, we think, any longer hesitates to admit that socialism, when fully launched, is going to mean out-and-out equality of income among all the adult members of society, from hod-carriers and stone-breakers up to the rarest artists, jurists, authors, and professional experts.

Intelligent socialists may think they see how this economic leveling can be made to consist with that rich diversity, manifoldness, and individualism in society to which we are accustomed. We cannot but believe that most of them, in adopting communism, inwardly consent to some measure of social leveling as well; but, even if they do not expect this, the vast majority of their followers not only expect it, but hope for it and are determined to have it. Diversity in economic condition and diversity in social condition involve each other. Socialist thinkers will have to admit this; less intelligent socialists enthusiastically recognize it already.

The socialism so rapidly growing is thus, in effect, a crusade against the highlands of men's life in the supposed interest of the bog. Ears are of course familiar with the shrieks of dissent from that conclusion, but it seems to us inevitable. The social homogeneity sure to follow the scheme if victorious would be coarse rather than fine; low, not high. Leveling would be mainly downward.

It is less our business just now to show what must result from a real reign of socialism, than to indicate the mischief which socialist agitation has already done. Leveling purpose is this moment rife. By great caravans of more or less intelligent persons human weal is to-day apprehended as if wholly calculable in terms of food and clothing. Large wealth-making, however honest, is decried as criminal. Men would build forth the social body utterly without regard to heterogeneity, allowing no place for the genius, the artist, the dreamer, the mugwump, the rebel. The church in its worst days never meditated rendering life so insipid. Involved in the iron orderliness which socialism cannot but entail, any real man would cry out with Walt Whitman:

O for something pernicious and dread,
Something far away from a puny and pious life,
Something unproved, something in a trance,
Something escaped from the anchorage and driving free.

3. Culture is suffering from certain perversities in education. Bad and low ideals in education couple themselves with false and ignoble theories. Herbert Spencer would make all education turn on man's relation to nature, because, forsooth, man must ever live in, on, and with nature. Nay, critics reply, society is the great conception in education; we are closer to society than to nature. Yes, but each man's nearest environment is himself, a truth all but universally overlooked. Ethical training is neglected,—the creation of large, rich, rounded personalities, making life within oneself possible and good, and insuring rational happiness, in cases of advanced age, even when communion both with nature and society is at end. All of course recognize the place of nature study and of acquaintance with one's kind in duly rearing, furnishing and finishing personalities; but we insist on it as of sovereign importance that the human being himself be made and ceaselessly kept central in the educational process. Pestilential, too, is the cry for shorter courses,

that young people may begin work earlier in life, earn more, and be surer of large families. There is no fear that our population will be too small, but much that it will be too mean. It is to be hoped that Mr. Roosevelt will soon amend his frequent plea for swelling the census by urging quality of population as more of a desideratum, thus undoing a little the incalculable evil his words have wrought among the poor and thoughtless.

One must deprecate the rage for exclusively modern studies. All that has been urged to the contrary notwithstanding, these branches are less cultivating than well-taught classical disciplines. Touching only the here and the now, they cannot broaden the mind or shift hither and thither the spirit's point of view as needs to be done to produce an education worthy the name. Moreover, they are nearly always pursued with a more or less utilitarian aim. It is the great merit of classical reading, on the other hand, that it promises you no bread or meat, while it thrusts you at once into a strange, far-away world, from almost every point of which you see each nearer thing in some instructive and valuable new light. What can one know of the world which modern studies make familiar unless one has some acquaintance with the antique!

America should heed Stanley Hall's and M. Lavis's caution against excessive uniformity in educational system. Organization, methods, even standards, may have morbid similarity. Affiliation can easily be pressed too far. When one institution begins to ape another, even a better, be sure there is pus in its blood. A college, like a code of laws or a governmental constitution, is good and valuable, not mainly in proportion as it conforms to abstract educational theory, but mainly as it has grown up from and with the people for whom it exists.

University training is a rare boon; let all who can, take advantage of it. And you will rarely find anyone, however brilliant or well-informed, who has failed of this discipline, whose mental work does not painfully betray the lack. Still, far be the day when reverence for schools,

examinations, diplomas shall be strong enough to bar independent spirits from any reward of the intellectual life. No university faculty on earth dare,—not all such faculties together dare,—to profess human knowledge in its entirety. To get an actual encyclopedia you must go outside. Much of the world's best thinking must continue to be done, as always hitherto, by non-schoolmen like John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, and Eduard von Hartmann.

The method of college teaching has in important respects changed for the worse. Wordsworth, also De Quincey, distinguished literature into two kinds,—the literature of knowledge and the literature of power,—books that inform and books that inspire and create. You can fruitfully divide methods of collegiate instruction in the same way. There is instruction that merely imparts information and there is instruction that sets on fire, consumes and recreates the pupil. The one conceives the student as a receptacle, and its motto is, 'Fill him up'; the other conceives him as a rational being, and its motto is, 'Build him up.' Your typical college professor of to-day represents the one kind; President Mark Hopkins in his prime the other. This instruction of impartation has nearly swept the field, displacing the old instruction of power. In higher classes, especially, there is not enough drill, too little of resolute grapple between teacher's and learner's mind. Socrates's method of give and take is forgotten. The crib is filled with food, but little effort put forth to make it appetizing or nutritious, still less to give the eater voracity and assimilating power. He may eat or he may starve. Very many teachers wholly repudiate the function of men-making, anxious solely to exalt the subjects which they teach. They compass land and sea to build a course of lectures, a book, a system, but, save as an incident, do nothing upon the infinitely more needful task of furthering the manhood they face each day in class.

No wonder that students in college show, as compared

with those of years past, great dearth of moral enthusiasm. There is fair zeal for hard study, for intellectual attainments, for qualifications that shall bring place and name and fortune; but little for ideals, truth on its own account. Quite in vain would you search American institutions of high learning to find students, as one easily could do once, in societies, in dormitories, on college walks, engaging each other with blood-heat arguments, sometimes leading to duels, on questions like slavery, capital punishment, the rights of majorities. Equally vital questions crowd the forum to-day, issues on whose solution the whole weal of humanity hangs; but they stir very little the breasts of college men. Nor can one refer this in any great degree to change of view touching debate as a means of advancing truth. Its main cause is sheer moral apathy.

4. The doctrine of evolution, deriving each higher life-form from a lower one by insensible differentiation, is quite compatible with the highest human culture, but mechanical or atelic evolution is not so. Purely Darwinian ethics,—biological, hedonistic,—making self-love the final source of all our moral promptings, could never have reared the best selfhood our humanity has realized and can never sustain this. The philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche is a perfectly logical working out of Darwinian biology in the field of men's moral life. Could that strange teacher sight earth from where he is, it would certainly refresh him to see his doctrine spreading,—the doctrine that might makes right, that Jenghis Khan, Timur, Alexander, and such conquerors are the model men, that to love all, forgive injuries, help the poor and lowly, and so on, is a religion fit only for slaves, that Christ's great words have already lost all power over superior races and individuals and must soon completely and forever pass away.

In memorable chapters Arthur James Balfour shows what the effect must be should biological ethics thus triumph. He points out that to live worthily, to obey high

ideals, is in the long run impossible for him who does not view the world as somehow the product of purpose.

The assumptions of naturalism absolutely contradict not only our spontaneous moral beliefs and promptings, but also derivative convictions that are of vital moment to society if progress is to mark the future. Naturalism can give no reason why any sentiment, impulse, or conviction which in any manner is of advantage to the race should be preferred to any other impulse or conviction as more worthy of consideration or obedience. The basest appetites, the hardest selfishness, the most ferocious hatred, naturalism places on the same level of nobility,—call the level low or high,—as the most self-denying devotion or the most death-defying heroism. The tiger in you and the saint in you proceed from the same kind of causes; both were evolved for the same end, the maintenance of the species. By the theory of unpurposed or mechanical evolution conscience itself, the sweetest, loftiest, most unselfish virtue, can have no diviner meaning than that the family, tribe, or nation is biologically more valuable than the individual.

Reasoning according to the principles of purposeless evolution, let us suppose the process of evolution reversed. Imagine courage and self-control to have been the qualities first needed, first evolved, and therefore most radically ingrained in the nature of our ancestors, and think of selfishness, cowardice, greed, and lust as impulses called for and hence developed only at a later stage of the world's growth. In that case, naturalistic evolution would bid us look for those exalted emotions which now attend courage and abnegation, in connection with selfishness, cowardice, and lust. Preachers would then earnestly warn us to beware of excessive indulgence in deeds of self-immolation as a deadly thing. Hereditary instinct bears you that way, they would say, but you must resist it. Mortify the longing to do good which is in your members, and gird yourselves for rioting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness, strife and envying. Do not im-

peril your soul by toil for others, but, as you value salvation, cultivate with all your might the grace of having a good time.

As moral conduct finds in the theory of mechanical evolution no justification by looking back to the genesis of our experiences, upon the same hypothesis it finds none in looking forward. In that view, the individual, of course, ceases forever with his bodily death. But the race itself does not survive him long. In a period quite possible to be measured, its term almost in sight, the energies of our solar system will decay. The sun will stop shining, and the earth, too cold longer to produce or to continue life, will cease to be the habitation of man. All will then be as if conscious spirits had never been. Religion, reason, and art, with the glorious records which they had while there was mind to contemplate them, will be clean gone forever. Life and love, hate and death, everything speakable and unspeakable which now engages human thought, as well as all the realms of undiscovered and potential being, will be canceled in blank annihilation.

True, the moral results of thinking like this have not yet fully revealed themselves in any community. Which means in part that the people who so believe have not been able to impress their ideas upon their fellows, and in part that the believers themselves probably do not, a single one of them, realize in their characters the inevitable logic of their convictions. But this schism between conviction and conduct cannot continue forever. The mind of man is at bottom rational. Inevitably, sooner or later, his beliefs take effect in his behavior. Either the naturalistic thinking or the altruistic conduct must go by the board. If naturalism is the truth, morality is but a haphazard catalogue of prudential regulations; beauty is unsubstantial and accidental, not eternal; and even reason is nothing else but a habit by which our thoughts chance to take one course rather than another. Well says Mr. Balfour: "All that gives dignity to life, all

that gives value to effort, shrinks and fades under the pitiless glare of a creed like this."

Such are, as it seems to us, the worst reefs athwart the track of the world's spiritual commerce in our day; such is our chart of the seas where they lie. Our review brings heartening along with soberness. Tenacious as mediæval gloom was, it did at last give way. The sources of culture gush perennially. If former checks upon their flow proved temporary, the present subsidence will be so,—the more certainly because of books and schools, instrumentalities once feeble, but now and always henceforth invincible.

In what quarter of the heavens dawn will first show, it were rash to predict. Socialism will run a long course, so will perverse education. There are happy signs that wealth-seekers are beginning to distinguish between wealth as a means and wealth as an end. Hardest to reform will doubtless be men's faith. Perhaps another Messiah will have to be awaited. Meantime, every child of the day may do somewhat to widen the skirts of light. As Emerson exhorts: "Bend to the persuasion which is flowing to you from every highest prompting of human nature to be its tongue to the heart of man and to show the besotted world how passing fair is wisdom."

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ORIGINALITY AND CULTURE.

J. W. SCOTT.

WITH the progress of mechanical invention and the growing ease with which the material needs of man have come to be supplied, a great store of human energy and skill has been set free to spend itself on satisfying our higher human wants. These wants have had to be created. In a large extent they have been so; and, in-